



# Conservancy floating idea of hatchery ownership

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*C File Photo/The Inyo Register*

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy is currently in talks with the Department of Fish and Game concerning the transfer of the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery into the Conservancy's ownership. No decision on the transfer has been made. File photo

County leaders learned last week that an effort is under way to transfer ownership of the historic Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery from the California Department of Fish and Game to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

Currently, the SNC is looking into the legal requirements and development of an action plan and future use plan for the property, should it decide to take over management of the facility.

Before a decision is made on the potential transfer, representatives from the SNC said the organization has a lot to learn, and the DFG will be required to provide more information about the transfer process and its goals for the hatchery.

SNC Eastern Sierra Representative Dana Stroud said her organization wants to ensure that it is willing and able to care for the grounds and facilities. Stroud also said the SNC is working with the DFG to see how the property can be managed (what constraints the state agency will put on the SNC) and, if the conservancy does obtain the leases at the hatchery, if the property and facilities can be sub-leased or sold to an agency such as the Friends of the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery for long-term use.

"The DFG can't continue to operate the hatchery and wants sustainable ownership," Stroud said last Tuesday. "There are many, many ideas for use of the facility," but it is clear that the DFG does not want Mt. Whitney to revert to an operating fish hatchery.

Stroud said that ownership and management of a facility like the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery is not what the SNC was designed for, and the ultimate goal would be to work with the Friends of the Hatchery to manage the facility.

Currently there is no hard time-line set for the decision-making process, and the SNC is investigating every angle to ensure the hatchery is an investment the organization is willing and able

to make.

“We’re doing the due diligence,” Stroud said. “We’re looking at the legal requirements, reviewing existing leases and developing an action plan and future use plan to see what the facility can be used for in the future.”

Bruce Ivey of the Friends of the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery said his organization has a business plan for the facility, but the DFG has refused to release the facility to them. “The SNC never asked to get involved, and the chances of success (of the transfer) are probably not very good,” Ivey said, adding that, if the Friends could obtain the lease for the property, it would be able to operate the hatchery in a sustainable way.

Ivey went on to say that time is a factor for the facility, as there is a lot of maintenance that must be done on the buildings. Currently, volunteers with the Friends group spend countless hours keeping the grounds at the hatchery clean and doing maintenance on the buildings when it is needed. Ivey said if the group could take over the facility, it would be able to raise enough money to stay on top of maintenance and keep the grounds from deteriorating. “Basically, what we’re dealing with is the DFG, and we want the DFG out of the way,” Fourth District Supervisor Marty Fortney said. “DFG holds the property, and just wants to shut it down.”

Stroud said members of the SNC will be meeting at the hatchery next month to tour the grounds, look at maintenance needs and discuss how it should proceed with the transfer discussions. That meeting will be held June 6. The public is invited to attend.